

SHAFT-Music from the Soundtrack

Composed and Performed by **ISAAC HAYES**



MGM's

# SHAFT



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1. **THEME FROM SHAFT** 4:40
2. **BUMPY'S LAMENT** 1:52
3. **WALK FROM REGIO'S** 2:24
4. **ELLIE'S LOVE THEME** 3:18
5. **SHAFT'S CAB RIDE** 1:11
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13. **SHAFT STRIKES AGAIN** 3:05
14. **DO YOUR THING** 19:28
15. **THE END THEME** 1:59

BONUS TRACK:

16. **THEME FROM SHAFT** (2009 Mix) 4:45

Original album produced by ISAAC HAYES

Original soundtrack album recorded at Stax Recording Studios,  
Memphis, TN

#1-15 released July 23, 1971 as Enterprise 2-5002.

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Isaac Hayes, the hottest soul musician now on the scene, has been signed to write his first motion picture score for MGM's new Black detective action production, *Shaft* . . . the picture is Black director Gordon Parks's second film and introduces Richard Roundtree in the title role.

—*Chicago Daily Defender*, April 24, 1971

It's the *sound of Shaft* that won't cop out, to paraphrase that still familiar lyric, even if one distinctive aspect has lost its juice. "Would you believe that when I used to say 'this cat Shaft is a bad mother...' people were cringing during those days," said Hayes a few years before he died in 2008. "That's how things have changed. Right now it's like Sunday school."

In 1971, the choice of Hayes to create the score for *Shaft* was not an obvious one, but it wasn't without precedent. A number of era-defining films—*The Graduate* in 1967; *Midnight Cowboy*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and *Easy Rider* in '69—had featured soundtracks peppered with rock and pop tunes of the day. But a soul-focused soundtrack had yet to be produced for a major film, and a major R&B producer had yet to receive the call to create an entire score.

It was Gordon Parks who first made the move, another bold step in a prolific career defined by a pioneering boldness.

Parks initially earned renown as a photographer in the 1940s, his groundbreaking images convincing *Life* magazine to hire him as their first black on-staff lensman. He produced award-winning photographic essays through the '50s, while also serving as a consultant to various film projects, and directing a number of television documentaries. By the 1960s, he had expanded his creative pursuits to poetry, literature and, in 1969, cinema—becoming Hollywood's first major black director with an adaptation of his novel *The Learning Tree*, a look at love and racism set in his native Kansas. Teaming with producer Joel Freeman, Parks next set his sights on bringing the story of John Shaft to the big screen.

*Shaft* was writer Ernest Tidyman's creation—tough, streetwise black detective-for-hire whose adventures saw him bumping (often violently) into drug dealers and black-power radicals, Mafia

henchmen and dirty cops, and also bedding foxy females, both black and white.

The time was evidently right for an eyes-open treatment of ghetto reality and other aspects of black struggle. *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, directed and produced by, and starring Melvin Van Peebles, portrayed a revolutionary on the



McIntosh

run in an X-rated, urban version of cinema verité. It preceded Parks's film by only a few months.

*Shaft* would be set in present-day New York City—from Times Square to Harlem—and the music had to reflect that. Hayes had much to recommend him for the gig. He was a proven hit-maker, composing and producing such high-energy '60s soul anthems as Sam and Dave's "Hold On, I'm Comin'" and "Soul Man" at Stax Records. He was a multi-instrumentalist who could cook with a variety of flavors—soul, funk, blues, jazz, old school R&B. He was at home in the studio—working with vocalists, small instrumental ensembles or full-on horn and string sections. In 1970, he had even written music for a movie, albeit for Norman Mailer's underground debacle *Maidstone* (notorious for a bloody, unstaged fight between Mailer and actor Rip Torn).



Richard Roundtree and Isaac Hayes

And by 1971 Hayes was a star in his own right. Two years before, recording under his own name for the Enterprise label, an imprint created by Stax specifically for him, Hayes had practically invented the soul *album* with *Hot Buttered Soul*: a musically consistent suite of four extended performances. It was a million-seller and showed off the elements of Hayes's developing signature style: funky yet mellow grooves; a penchant for psychedelic electric guitar; a warm, baritone voice that spoke as often as it sang. The most memorable track was a moody, 18-minute version of the Jimmy Webb country tune "By the Time I Get to Phoenix" that opened with an eight-minute soliloquy.

"Hayes's inherent sense of the dramatic—so well demonstrated in his raps—made him an obvious choice for the scoring of *Shaft*," noted *The New York Times* (using a term that now refers to a musical style and subculture but, in the early '70s, simply meant speaking from the heart.) "But I started thinking about big movie scores," Hayes told the writer Don Heckman, "—[*Doctor*] *Zhivago*, and things like that—and I thought, 'Wow, can





I do that?’ But [jazz composer] Tom McIntosh—he was my consultant on the picture—said ‘You don’t have to go through a whole lot of changes, just do your thing, be yourself. Your experience is a black experience and that is how you should relate to it.’”

“The one thing I’ve learned from *Shaft*...is that pop music doesn’t set any restrictions any more. You don’t just have to go up there and sing a song because that’s the way it was always done before. Use whatever means necessary, be it rap, song, or arrangement, to get across to people.”

—Isaac Hayes, *The New York Times*, April 23, 1972

Hedging their bets, Parks and Freeman first asked Hayes to create music for three of the film’s most important moments: the movie’s opening scene in Times Square; an intimate interlude in Shaft’s bedroom; and Shaft walking through Harlem. “I came up to New York,” Hayes recalled, “and saw some of the footage, but you know I never did read the screenplay or the book. They thought I did, but I didn’t. Even so, I had ‘Ellie’s Love Theme’ and part of the main theme written down by the time I went back to Memphis.” Parks and Freeman heard those initial musical sketches and were sold. “A little later, I went to California and started working on the whole picture, reel by reel,” Hayes added.

In his precisely researched book *Soulsville U.S.A.: The Story of Stax Records*, music historian Rob Bowman describes the six-week period in late spring 1971 when the *Shaft* soundtrack was fully realized. Hayes worked in Hollywood Monday to Friday, then jetted off to perform with his group The Isaac Hayes Movement on weekends. “The recording of the soundtrack at the MGM Studio had its share of cultural clashes,” Bowman notes. At the outset, Hayes’s impromptu approach to recording—Stax’s modus operandi—caught the engineer at the MGM soundstage off-guard.

“We walked in,” recounted Hayes. “And the engineer says, ‘OK, where is



your sheet music?’ ‘We ain’t got no music. We don’t use music, we don’t write anything. We’re just going to do it headwise.’ “Say what?!? You ain’t got no music?”

All went well in the end as Bowman reports, “Isaac had been allotted two days to do the rhythm tracks. He was finished an hour and ten minutes before quitting time on the first day. The next day Isaac recorded the string and horn parts, and on the third day he laid down his vocal tracks...”

Ironically, the world’s first major film score created by a soul music producer boasts few tracks that fit neatly into the category of soul. For *Shaft*, Hayes created music in a wide variety of black styles—some vocal, most instrumental—to serve the film’s many moods and locations. There are the punchy horns and organ-trio groove of “No Name Bar.” The popping, jazzy pulse of “Be Yourself.” The gentle, 3/4 feel of “A Friend’s Place” that channels the bittersweet sway of a Bacharach-David melody.

Bowman writes:

For a scene in which a cab glides through New York City at night [“*Shaft’s* Cab Ride”], Isaac employed muted trumpets to suggest nightlife. When he needed to create incidental jukebox music for a restaurant scene, Isaac recalled that a jazz guitarist always had records on the jukebox at the Four-Way Grill in Memphis. Consequently, he wrote “Café Regio’s” in the style of Wes Montgomery [with orchestration help from jazz trombonist J.J. Johnson]. Similarly inspired was the way Isaac treated John Shaft’s two different love scenes...“For ‘Shaft Strikes

Again,” explains Isaac, “when he had the girl in the shower, it was a love scene but it didn’t matter to him like it did when it was Ellie. It was more a promiscuous thing with that girl but with Ellie it was warmer with the vibes [vibraphone.]

Two other tracks created for *Shaft*—included on the two-disc sound-



track album that came out in conjunction with the film’s release in July 1971—are noteworthy. “Soulsville,” a slow-moving vocal heard behind a lengthy ghetto scene, features a mournful saxophone and Hayes’s somber voice delivering a sermon on inner city reality: “Some of the brothers’ got plenty of cash/Tricks on the corner is going to see to that/Some like to smoke and some like to blow/Some are even strung out on a 50-dollar jones.” And filling an entire album side was the 19-minute jam “Do Your Thing,” a song that opens with a simple message (“If there’s something you wanna say/And talkin’ is the only way/Rap on...”) then yields to a lengthy electric guitar solo—much tremolo and distortion—pushed along by intermittent horn lines and chanting of the song title, and ending with a sound that still finds its way into hip hop productions: a record player’s tone arm scratching across vinyl.

And then there was “Theme from *Shaft*.”

The *Shaft* thing? Oh yeah, everybody was going “chicka-chicka-chicka-chicka.” They wore that out. So much so that, you know, I kind of layed back, because all I could hear was me [laughs]. I needed something new to hear. It took a while.

—Isaac Hayes, AV Club Online, 2006

“When Shaft pops up out of that subway, that’s when we should really come on and carry him all the way through Times Square,” Gordon Parks says to Hayes in footage shot at the recording sessions, explaining the music he imagines for the film’s title sequence. “That should be a driving, savage beat so we’re right with him all the time.” Hayes responds by playing what he had composed so far.

Hayes purposefully delayed the completion of the film’s primary theme until the rest of the soundtrack was in place. “I had to finish it before I could put the topping on the main theme, because I wanted it to be a kind of abstract of the other melodies in the picture. I put them in there in such a way that they can’t be easily detected, but they’re in there, alright.”





The “Theme from *Shaft*” became the watershed, the four minutes and forty seconds after which so much changed. It’s hard to imagine the film’s overnight success without it, or Hayes’s career taking off like it did (within a year he had “30 people working for me—musicians, personal assistants, security, accountants, and we’ve got everything arranged like a corporation.”) And it’s downright impossible to consider the disco era without the influence of the sixteenth-note, hi-hat pattern, or the wah-wah rhythm-guitar riff that figure so prominently in “Theme from *Shaft*.”

Both musical ideas came from Stax sessions in the ‘60s, Bowman reports, the hi-hat lick from “the break in the final section of Otis Redding’s 1966 recording of ‘Try a Little Tenderness,’” and the guitar part from “a long forgotten track that for one reason or another was never released.”

Discussing these and other component parts of the tune cannot fully explain the impact of the mini-symphony Hayes created, but it helps to note how unusual many were and how successful he was in integrating them. There are the number of distinct melodic hooks—four? five?—the song boasted, and the variety of instruments that sang those lines—flutes, horns, strings, and voices. There’s the amount of time that elapsed—more than two-and-a-half minutes!—before the vocal part began. And then that call-and-

response, or rather, question-and-answer lyric that elevated its subject to a mythic level of machismo: who was the black private dick that was a sex machine to all the chicks . . . who would risk his neck for his brother man . . . who wouldn’t cop out?

As the female chorus sang, there was but one possible reply: *Shaft!*

If you wanted to stretch the Moses analogy, you might say the peak of Isaac Hayes’s mountain was the stage on Academy Awards night. Instead of a tablet of stone he received a gold statue...

—Leonard Feather,  
*Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1972

Released in September 1971, “Theme from *Shaft*” was an immediate crossover phenomenon aided by good timing. Four years since soul had taken over the pop charts and crowned Aretha Franklin its queen, mainstream America was inured to the sound of true, unprocessed black music—music that told it the way it is. The song about a straight-talking, hard-hitting, sex-machine of a man was *everywhere*: a #1 Pop Single, and #2 R&B. A number of the tune’s utterances—“You damn right,” “Shut your mouth!”—became a ubiquitous part of American phraseology. They were repeated on street corners and comedy sketches, none more than the suggestion of that distinctly African-American, four-syllable epithet Hayes daringly slipped onto Pop radio: “*bad mother...*”

With the single’s popularity, the *Shaft* soundtrack became a #1 selling album in both Pop and R&B categories, remaining

on the charts for a jaw-dropping sixty weeks. Edited to three minutes, “Do Your Thing” was released as a followup single in early 1972 and reached #3 on the R&B singles chart.

1972 rolled on and accolades and awards poured in. In February, Hayes took home a Golden Globe for Best Original Score. At the Grammy ceremony in New York City that March, he sported a golden robe and received standing ovations as he won for Best Original Score and for Instrumental Arrangement. In April in Los Angeles, wearing a blue and

white fur-lined tuxedo of his own design, he bounded up to the stage to claim the Oscar for Best Original Song—the first Academy Award won by an African-American in a non-acting category.



Of all of Hayes’s spotlight moments that year none could match the enduring impact of one in particular—his performance of “Theme from *Shaft*” during the televised broadcast of the Oscars. Wearing sunglasses and leather pants, naked from the waist up save for a loose set of chains that mimicked a vest, Hayes stood tall, proud, and muscular at the piano, while around him swirled an elaborate, erotically charged dance number, a spectacle of unleashed libido. The image of a black body wearing chains could not help but conjure the specter of slavery. Yet it also seemed to suggest a kinky form of self-empowerment: those shiny links of subjugation transformed into a freaky fashion option.

Hayes’s initial desire had been not to score *Shaft*, but to kick off an acting career playing its lead. That April night, for a few short minutes in prime time, Hayes got his wish. He became the embodiment of Shaft, expressing his blackness on a mainstream stage with no filter or compromise, much like the hard-nosed private eye Roundtree portrayed. The ring of (mostly white) female dancers gyrating around Hayes poked at perhaps the most entrenched of racial stereotypes: white America’s dread of black masculinity. In the film, Parks pushed that same button *hard*, shooting Shaft’s dalliance with a white chick as a nude shower scene.

Talk about penetration. According to the Nielsen ratings, 75% of all TV sets nationwide turned on that evening caught

NBC’s broadcast of the ceremony. Whoever had yet to feel the impact of Parks’s film or its soundtrack got a wake-up call as to the state of black pride, black attitude, and black music in 1972.

And black America? Within a few years of the huge success of the *Shaft* soundtrack, such singers and producers as Curtis Mayfield, Marvin Gaye, James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Norman Whitfield, Willie Hutch had created scores for movies aimed at black audiences—a cinematic wave large enough to merit its own name.

Blaxploitation both united the black community, and divided it as well. The



Isaac Hayes & the Bar-Kays upon the release of “Son of *Shaft*” the follow-up to *Shaft*.







Yet for legions of musicians, composers, R&B producers, and dance-floor deejays—not to mention countless fans in the know—what Hayes forged in 1971 had never left.

At the premiere of the remake, 28 years and 18 albums after creating the original soundtrack, Hayes told it like it was. “I’ve talked to some younger A&R people who’d say, ‘Well, what have you done lately?’ And I thought to myself, just turn on the radio and listen to some of your hip-hop stuff—that’s what I’ve done lately!”

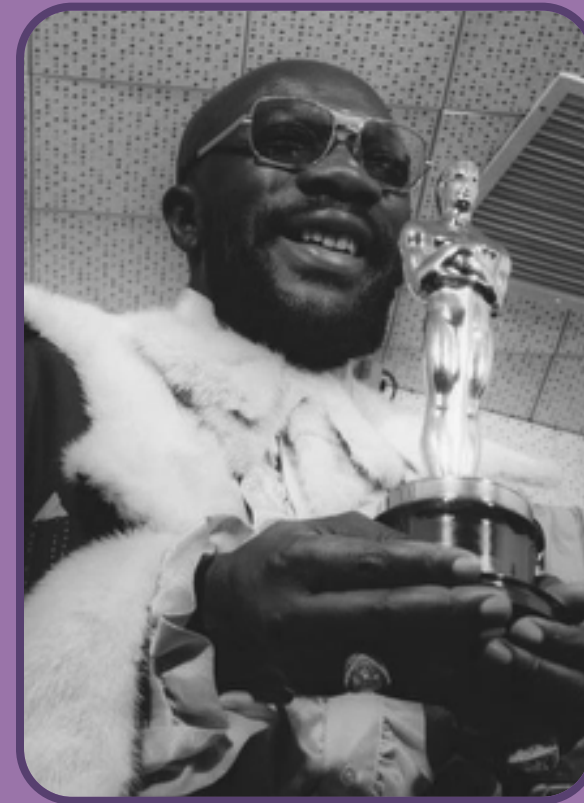
—Ashley Kahn  
August 2009



era-defining music that flowed from widely popular films like *Superfly*, *The Mack*, *Black Caesar*, *Coffy*, *Slaughter’s Big Rip-Off*, *Across 110th Street* and others was accompanied by much hand-wringing brought on by blaxploitation’s glorification of street life and its excesses. *Shaft* rose above the fray with a heroic lead who protected and enabled his community without crossing the line; it yielded two sequels—*Shaft’s Big Score* and *Shaft in Africa*—and a television series before fading away like designer jeans, replaced by a long succession of black heroes and their epic tales of getting over and moving on up.

Meanwhile, Hayes’s personal ascension seemed unstoppable. He came to be regarded not only as a community leader but a spiritual one as well, a role he encouraged with his next album. *Black Moses* featured an image of him in a robe looking heavenward; the cover unfolded into the shape of a cross. But it could not last; he never again achieved the heights of 1972 despite solid albums and a few more R&B hits. In later years, Hayes continued to record, while lending his baritone voice to various projects (*South Park* for one) and acting in a number of films—as was his original intension with *Shaft*.

*Shaft*—the remake—came out in 2000 with Samuel L. Jackson as its lead, Richard Roundtree in a minor role, and Hayes’s “Theme from *Shaft*” still up front and center. For a few weeks the soul maestro and his masterpiece were once again pulled into the national spotlight.



Ashley Kahn is the author of *A Love Supreme: The Story of John Coltrane’s Signature Album* and other books. He often contributes to National Public Radio’s “Morning Edition” and teaches at New York University.





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**BONUS TRACK:**

16. **THEME FROM SHAFT (2009 MIX)** 4:45

All selections composed by **Isaac Hayes** (Irving Music-BMI).  
Produced by **ISAAC HAYES**

Horns and strings arranged by **Isaac Hayes** and **Johnny Allen**  
(except "Walk from Regio's" by **Isaac Hayes** and **J.J. Johnson**)

**Rhythm section by the Bar-Kays and The Movement:**

**Isaac Hayes**—piano, vibes, organ, electric piano

**Lester Snell**—electric piano

**James Alexander**—bass guitar

**Michael Toles, Charles Pitts**—lead and rhythm guitars

**Willie Hall**—drums, tambourine

**Gary Jones**—bongos, congas

**The Memphis Strings & Horns**

on "Shaft's Cab Ride":

**Ronald Hudson**—bass guitar

**Sidney Kirk**—piano

Copyists—**Onzie Horne, Mickey Gregory**

Special thanks to **Lester Snell** and **Tony McIntosh**.

Original score recorded at **MGM Studios**, Los Angeles, CA; 1971  
Original soundtrack album recorded at **Stax Recording Studios**, Memphis, TN; 1971  
Engineers—**William Brown, Henry Bush, Bobby Manuel, Dave Purple**  
Editing—**Daryl Williams**  
Remix—**Ron Capone, Dave Purple**  
Original cover design—**Tony Seiniger**

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Reissue produced by **Chris Clough**

24-bit remastering—**Bob Fisher** at **Pacific Multimedia**

"Theme from *Shaft*" (2009 mix) by **Bob Fisher** at **Pacific Multimedia**

Editorial—**Rikka Arnold**

Project Assistance—**Abbey Anna, Bill Belmont, Jennifer Peters, Nick Phillips**

Reissue Package Design—**Jimmy Hole**

Photos courtesy of the **Stax** archives

BUTTER YOUR SOUL WITH THE MOVEMENT  
WHICH IS TO BE CONTINUED BY BLACK MOSES.

